

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-16

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2424

INFO AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE NEW DELHI 8815

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PINT, IN

SUBJECT: CONGRESS CHOSSES F. A. AHMED AS ITS CANDIDATE  
FOR PRESIDENT OF INDIA

BEGIN SUMMARY: THE CONGRESS PARTY HAS NOMINATED THE MUSLIM UNION MINISTER OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE AS ITS CANDIDATE FOR THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION WHICH WILL BE HELD IN MID-AUGUST. THE SUBSTANTIAL CONGRESS MAJORITY IN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTORAL COLLEGE (ELECTED MEMBERS OF CENTRAL AND STATE LEGISLATURES) MAKES AHMED'S ELECTION A FOREGONE CONCLUSION. AHMED'S SELECTION WILL ENABLE THE PRIME MINISTER TO CHOOSE A MORE CAPABLE MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, STRENGTHEN HER AND THE CONGRESS PARTY'S APPEAL AMONG MUSLIMS, AND ENSURE HERSELF OF AN ABSOLUTELY DOCILE PRESIDENT. SHE MAY ALSO USE AHMED'S EXIT FROM THE CABINET AS A PRELUDE TO SOME CABINET

RESHUFFLING. WHILE THE CONGRESS PARTY HAS YET TO ANNOUNCE ITS CANDIDATE FOR VICE-PRESIDENT, THE PRESENT INCUMBENT WILL ALSO HAVE TO STEP ASIDE. END SUMMARY

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1. ON JULY 1 THE CENTRAL PARLIAMENTARY BOARD OF THE

CONGRESS PARTY SELECTED THE 69 YEAR OLD UNION MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, FAKHRUDDIN A. AHMED, AS THE CONGRESS CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDNET OF INDIA. THOUGH NO ELECTION DATE HAS BEEN ANNOUNCED, THE PRESIDENTIAL POLL WILL PROBABLY BE HELD DURING THE WEEK PRECEDING THE EXPIRY OF V.V. GIRI'S 5-YEAR TERM ON AUGUST 23.

2. AHMED'S ELECTION IS A FOREGONE CONCLUSION SINCE THE CONGRESS PARY COMMANDS THE SUPPORT OF 68 PERCENT (AND NEEDS ONLY A BARE MAJORITY) OF THE ELECTORAL COLLEGE, WHICH CONSISTS OF THE ELECTED MEMBERS OF THE TWO HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT AND STATE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLIES. DESPITE THE OVERWHELMING CONGRESS MAJORITY, SOME PRESS PUNDITS ARE GUESSING THAT PRESIDENT GIRI MAU STILL SEEK REELECTION AS AN INDEPENDENT WITH SUPPORT FORM LEFT-WING PARTIES. (GIRI, A VETERAN LABOR LEADER, WON AS AN INDEPENDENT IN 1969 WHEN MRS. GANDHI SUPPORTED HIM AGAINST THE SYNDICATE-BACKED CONGRESS CANDIDATE, SANJIVA REDDY). THERE ARE ALSO CONTINUING PRESS FUMORS SARVADOYA LEADER, JAYA PRAKASH NARAYAN MAY RUN ON A PUBLIC MORALITY PLATFORM, DESPITE PUBLIC DENIALS BY NARAYAN HIMSELF.

3. IT IS WIDELY ACCEPTED THAT MRS. GANDHI PERSONALLY CHOSE AHMED AS THE CONGRESS NOMINEE. A CONGRESS LOYALIST OF 40 YEARS STANDING AND NATIVE OF ASSAM, AHMED GAVE FULL SUPPORT TO THE PRIME MINISTER DURING THE 1969 SPLIT. HE IS LOYAL BUT NOT VERY CAPABLE. HIS DEPARTURE FROM THE CABINET ENABLES MRS. GANDHI TO CHOOSE A MORE COMPETENT MINISTER OF AGRICULTURE, PUT A MUSLIM IN THE PRESIDENCY AS A DUAL SYMBOL OF INDIA'S SECULARISM AND CONGRESS' FAVOR TOWARDS ITS IMPORTANT MUSLIM CONSTITUENCY, AND ENSURE HERSELF OF AN ABSOLUTELY DOCILE PRESIDNET WHO WOULD NOT CRITICIZE OR ATTEMPT TO FRUSTRATE HER POLICIES (AS THE PRESENT INCUMBENT, V.V. GIRI HAS DONE ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS).

4. MRS. GANDHI MAY ALSO USE AHMED'S EXIT FROM THE CABINET AS A PRELUDE TO SOME CABINET RESHUFFLING. SHE IS KNOWN TO BE DISSATISFIED WITH THE PERFORMANCE OF LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SOME ECONOMIC MINISTREES (SHE RECENTLY TOOL PERSONAL CHARGE OF THE HIGH LEVEL CABINET COMMITTEE OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE, DOWNGRADING AHMED WHO HAD CHAIRED THE COMMITTEE). ANOTHER MUSLIM WILL ALSO NOW PRESUMABLY BE ELEVATED TO A FULL MINISTERIAL SLOT IN THE CABINET.

5. THOUGH THE CONGRESS NOMINEE FOR THE VICE PRESIDNTSHIP

IS YET TO BE ANNOUNCED, THE PRESENT INCUMBENT, A VATIVE  
OF UTTAR PRADESH, WILL PROBABLY HAVE TO STEP ASIDE FOR  
SOMEONE FROM THE SOUTH.  
SCHNEIDER

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**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
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